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RIO GRANDE NEWSLETTER

United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO
Box 54, Rio Grande City, Texas 78582

PROGRESS IN STARR COUNTY

The strike against the big melon growers of Starr County is still quiet. Hurricane Beulah destroyed most of the winter harvest in Starr County. Some of the big growers have re-plowed, and put in crops for the Spring. But there will not be much work in Starr County until late Spring. Wages are going down in town, and many non-farm jobs are paying 50¢ an hour or less, because there are no jobs in the fields and people are desperate for work.

The Union still faces two major problems which, until solved, will make successful strikes almost impossible. The first is the open-border policy of the Federal Government, which allows unlimited numbers of Mexican nationals to cross the border and break strikes. Under "Green Card" immigration permits, these poor people can be used to break any strike along the border. In spite of promises and "new regulations", the Government has done nothing. American workers refuse to leave the fields when they know their jobs will be taken by "green carders". The second major problem is that of anti-Union "laws" and the County cops and Texas Rangers who use these laws to break the strike. The Union is fighting these laws and the cops in the courts, but justice is anything but swift in Texas.

In spite of these problems, the farm workers can be very proud of what they have achieved in the last year. Wages have gone up from 60¢ or 80¢ before the strike to \$1 or \$1.15 an hour in the 1967 harvest. La Casita Farms says it will pay \$1.25 next year. The Union has told the whole world how the Texas growers treat their workers. It has inspired many people, farmworkers, Churches, Liberals, other Unions, and a Committee of United States Senators to work to change those conditions, to bring justice to South Texas. And the Farm Workers Union, while one of the smallest (and surely the poorest) in the state, is leading the fight against the anti-Union laws and the exploitation of the "green card" workers, a fight which other, more prosperous Unions had given up on.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Because there is little opportunity for winning a decision in the fields this winter, and because the Union can no longer afford a direct confrontation with the power structure (and the arrests, bail, and lawyers fees that such a confrontation involves) the Union has shifted to a more indirect method of organizing. The main emphasis will be on voter registration and community organizing, especially over issues such as corruption and mismanagement in the local government. Citizens groups, business and professional people, have gotten up their courage since the farm workers began challenging and exposing the corruption and feudal conditions in Starr County. A coalition is at last emerging on the local level which will fight with us against the power structure.

But for the Union to continue to lead the attack on the corrup-

tion and injustice of South Texas, it will need your support. The United Auto Workers, one of our most generous supporters, were hard hit financially by their own strike at Ford, and have not been able to help us for several months. And the end of the melon harvest in June, and with it the end of the picketing, the flags, the Rangers and arrests and bloodshed, has led to a decline in contributions from our previous supporters. We have been forced to tell many strikers to take jobs, at gas stations, stores, or in farms outside of Starr County, because the Union is no longer able to support them on even the modest basis of the past. (Some have taken jobs at 50¢ an hour, \$37 a week for a 72 hour week, half what they could make by scabbing at La Casita).

The problems and needs of Starr County, and of the farm workers in South Texas have changed little in the last two years. One difference is that now, at last, people have hope in their hearts, hope that next year, or the year after, things will be better. And they look to the Union to lead that struggle to change South Texas, to make things better. The farm workers ARE ready, they are willing to make sacrifices, to suffer, to go to jail. But the Union desperately needs your support to continue with this struggle. Your contributions, food and money, your prayers and support give the farm workers the strength and sustenance that they need to fight with. To win, the movement will need thousands of people committed to justice, working in our behalf, supporting us not only in the months of successes and publicity, but also in the months when progress seems painfully slow, and victory far away. With your help, we shall overcome... VIVA LA HUELGA.....

NEWS AND NOTES...

TRIALS AND INJUNCTIONS: An amended complaint against the Texas Rangers, calling for an injunction against unlawful arrests, intimidation and harrassment, has been filed in the Federal Court in Brownsville. Plaintiffs are Francisco ("Pancho") Medrano of the U.A.W.; David Lopez of the State AFL-CIO; and Kathy Baker, Gilbert Padilla, Magdaleno Dimas, Benito Rodriguez, all of the UFWOC, and the Union itself. All were victims of vicious and brutal attacks by the Texas Rangers last May and June. Defendants are Rangers Denson, Van Cleve, Preiss, Dawson, and Capt. A.Y. Allee; Starr County sheriffs Solis, Raul Pena, Rober Pena, Jim Rochester (who is La Casita Manager as well as a special deputy) and Judge B.S. Lopez.

La Casita Farms still has their special injunction outlawing all picketing and strike activity. It is being appealed in the District Court in San Antonio.

Of the over 130 arrests of strikers since June, 1966, only 12 have been brought to trial (in Roma, last December, 1966. Of the 12, eight were released as not guilty, and 4 were fined \$25 each for preventing scabs from crossing the International Bridge at Roma). The remaining 100-odd arrests, some dating back to June, 1966 have never had a fair hearing, or any hearing at all. Over \$10,000 in bail money is tied up, plus another \$10,000 in mortgaged land put up as bail. None of these cases is even scheduled for trial. No dates are set for hearings or trials.

HURRICANE BEULAH flooded all the farm workrr communities along

the Rio Grande River. The Arroyo Olmos flooded most of northeastern Rio Grande City (including 6 feet of water in the home of Gilbert Padilla, and a foot of water in the old strike kitchen and offices on Flores Street). The Union gave away all its supplies of food and clothing to refugees from Camargo (over 15,000 in Rio Grande at one time) who had been evacuated. The Union now has new offices at 105 Main Street (same phone, 497-2995). But our lawyer, Doran Williams, has returned to Austin after 6 months of faithful service. And our secretary is working on the grape boycott in San Antonio. So office hours are irregular.

CALIFORNIA GRAPE PICKERS STRIKE AGAINST GUIMARRA FRUIT COMPANY

Over 27 months ago, crews of Filipino workers went on strike against Guimarra during the first week of the Delano grape strike.

The Union has been concentrating against the Guimarra Company since August, 1967, when over 1800 Guimarra workers who had signed Union cards left the fields after Guimarra refused to hold an election or negotiate. Guimarra's grape crop averages \$12,000,000 a year. He also has cotton worth \$247,000 a year in direct government cash subsidies; orchards, oil wells, and a winery. A consumer boycott against Guimarra is in progress, with boycott committees in almost every major city in the country. Here is a progress report:

Guimarra's cold storage is approximately 85% full of unsold grapes. Of the grapes in storage, about 55% to 60% are Thompson seedless. Guimarra still has over 500 carlots of unsold grapes this year, compared to 240 carlots of unsold grapes as of late November, of last year. And the harvest this year was considerably less, due to the strike. Approximately 50% of the grapes in cold storage are "ARRA" brand. The remaining grapes are as follows, in order of importance: GRAPE KING, POUND STERLING, CAMELOT, NEW YORKER, BUCUSTY, SUN VIEW, PROSPERITY, AND FOW WOW. Smaller amounts are going out under different labels (write Box 130, Delano, Cal. for complete list of scab labels).

Boycott committees in Texas are: SAN ANTONIO, %Benito Rodriguez, 104 International Building; DALLAS-FORT WORTH, %Reynaldo de la Cruz, 1318 Continental Natl Bank Bldg. Fort Worth; AUSTIN, % Sue Randall, 2604 Bridle Path; EL PASO, % Natalie Gross, 329 Chelsea; CORPUS CHRISTI, %Roy Hall, 2325 Agnes. We have no committee yet in Houston, and would welcome someone volunteering to coordinate boycott efforts there. Boycotting involves checking the stores for scab labels, contacting stores and produce buyers and advising them of the strike and suggesting that they do not buy Guimarra, and if scab grapes are still being sold, to picket and leaflet customers going into the store advising them not to buy Guimarra grapes. The best boycotters convince the store not to handle the grapes without a picket line being necessary, and many store owners will cooperate once they know the facts. So there is plenty of work you could do on the boycott, even if you don't have time or don't want to walk a picket line.

CHRISTMAS DONATIONS & COLLECTIONS

The Union is hoping that up-state supporters will once again collect toys and food (and money) to brighten up the strikers' and members' Christmas here in the Valley. This year, even more than last farm workers will have a bleak Christmas indeed without your help. Toys which are wrapped should be marked as to what they are, or for what age or sex they are suitable. Parents will come and get toys suitable for their particular families. Slightly damaged toys are welcome. And if someone has some chickens (or turkeys or hams), they too would be very welcome. But let us know in advance about perishable food, so that we can arrange for freezing or refrigerators. And if someone would like to make a special gift to the Union for Christmas, in addition to money, which is always desperately needed, we could use an adding machine and a typewriter.

P.S. The Union has published a beautiful 32-page booklet, SONS OF ZARATA, about the strike in Texas, with text and over 70 photographs. It gives a complete history of the strike. It is on sale for 50¢ a copy or 25¢ a copy in bulk orders. Why not order 10 or 20 for your Union, club, church or friends. It is a perfect Christmas gift for your conservative friends or any growers you know.

As the New Year rolls around, be think of us. With your prayers and support, we can win... we will win... we must win...

VIVA LA HUELGA VIVA LA CAUSA VIVA LA UNION

DGA...

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